

# Sierra Club calls freeway team 'rubber stamp'

By Doug Murphy  
Staff Writer

The Sierra Club representative on the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team quit last week after calling the process a "sham."

She said the final straw was a decision to limit the amount of public participation at meetings.

"We believe that the public should have open access to this process and that they should have their comments considered and their questions answered," said Michelle Pulich Stewart, a volunteer with the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club.

She also expressed frustration at not having accurate traffic projections numbers and not being able to go back and look at the basic purpose and need for the South Mountain Loop 202 freeway that was first approved in 1988.

At the Feb. 23 advisory team meet-

ing Stewart also said that the group was acting as a "rubber stamp" for the Arizona Department of Transportation that she said has limited the committee's scope to such a degree that it cannot even consider a full range of alternatives.

"We're not saying no action - we're saying there are alternatives to building a road," Stewart said after she left the meeting.

The reaction by the advisory team was mixed.

"I don't know that this process is perfect, but I know everyone is trying their best," said David Lafferty who represents Tolleson on the all-volunteer advisory team.

Michael Goodman, also a team member, understood Stewart's frustration.

He said that many of the assumptions the freeway is based on came

**more Sierra, see page 5**

## Sierra

from page 1

from 1980 data, without taking into account the growth in Pinal County, Maricopa or the expected growth in the west side of Maricopa County.

"Just look at the changes in the last three years," said Goodman who represents the Phoenix Mountain Preserve Council on the advisory team.

"At some point we need to get back to that discussion of expanding the study area," Goodman said.

The advisory team was formed by ADOT to provide local input for the Environmental Impact Statement updating the 1988 tentative design and route of the freeway. The team meetings are open to the public, but only written questions are allowed, with answers provided during subsequent meetings only if an advisory team member specifically asks.

Public meetings, where the community is invited to attend and voice their feelings, have been held at key points in the process. The last public meetings were held in November when the proposed footprint of the freeway was unveiled for the first time, showing where the freeway would go and which homes would have to be demolished. That meeting drew over 2,100 people in Ahwatukee Foothills.

The Loop 202 would connect with Interstate 10 in Ahwatukee Foothills, follow Pecos Road and cut through a corner of South Mountain Park before turning north and reconnecting with I-10 somewhere between 51st Avenue and the Loop 101 interchange.

For more information, visit [www.southmountain-freeway.com](http://www.southmountain-freeway.com).

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